

Linnet *Carduelis cannabina*

STATUS

Widespread, common finch of agricultural and open lowland habitats.

National Red List (1996),

UK Steering Group Report medium list.



WHAT IS THE LINNET?

A small brown, streaky finch the linnet is a common and widespread farmland bird, that inhabits weedy fields, hedgerows, thickets of gorse, heathland and scrub. Linnets, both adult and chicks, feed almost entirely on seeds. The variety of seeds taken is large and shows wide regional variation, this in part explains the widespread distribution of this species. In winter, linnets form flocks with other finches and buntings, gathering on cultivated farmland, stubble fields and waste ground, wherever there is an abundance of weed seeds.

WHERE ARE THEY FOUND IN THE UK?

The national population in the early 1990s was estimated to be around 540,000 territories, with a widespread distribution breeding throughout England, Wales, eastern Scotland and Ireland. The current range shows a marked easterly bias with the strongholds of the population occurring along the east coast from Kent to Aberdeenshire.

WHY IS THE LINNET OF CONSERVATION IMPORTANCE?

The linnet is one of a suite of lowland farmland birds that have undergone serious declines in population in the latter half of the twentieth century.

THE LINNET IN THE DURHAM AREA

HOW HEALTHY ARE POPULATIONS OF THE LINNET?

Although still relatively common, the linnet has suffered severe declines in population with a decrease of more than 50% in the twenty-five years between 1968 and 1992. The decrease in population has not been accompanied by matching declines in range. There is no evidence to suggest that the linnet population in Durham has undergone the severe declines seen in other areas of the country.

HOW MUCH DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE LINNET IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

The linnet, its distribution and habitat preferences, is relatively well known as a result of its common occurrence across the area and its familiarity to local birdwatchers. Small populations have been monitored over long time periods by some local ornithologists.

WHERE HAS IT BEEN FOUND IN THE DURHAM AREA ?

Linnets are found throughout Durham from the uplands, through lowland farmland to urban fringe habitat. There are noticeable absences from the southeast of the area although this is probably due to poor observer coverage rather than a genuine absence of birds. There are also fewer records from the upland areas because these habitats are less suitable. Linnet populations can vary enormously from 2-3 pairs per hectare in urban areas to more than 30 in stands of gorse. There are estimated to be 5000 pairs of linnet in Durham.

LINNETS ARE AT RISK FROM:

Habitat loss, including destruction of stands of gorse, removal of hedgerows and areas of scrub.

Use of autumn sown crops and removal of winter stubbles.

Use of herbicides, which removes potentially available weed seeds.

LINNETS BENEFIT FROM:

Use of set aside, both permanent and rotational.

Use of extensively managed arable field margins.

Use of "game crops", a mixture of species sown to provide cover for game birds which can also provide winter food for linnets.

The extension of the Arable Stewardship Scheme to the Durham area.

IMPORTANT HABITATS FOR THE LINNET:

<i>Arable land</i>	*
<i>Gorse scrub</i>	
<i>Hedgerows</i>	**
<i>Unimproved grassland</i>	

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OTHER HABITAT ACTION PLANS COVERING ISSUES RELATED TO THE LINNET:

<i>Barn owl</i>	**
<i>Tree sparrow</i>	*
<i>Corn bunting</i>	*
<i>Reed bunting</i>	**
<i>Grey partridge</i>	**

N.B. ** indicates action plan produced in 1998
* indicates action plan produced in 2000

TARGETS FOR THE CONSERVATION OF LINNET IN THE DURHAM AREA:

	DATE
<i>Target 1 Maintain distribution and expand population of species in Plan area.</i>	ONGOING
<i>Target 2 Monitor populations on regular basis at trial sample sites.</i>	2003 onwards

LINNET AND THE LAW

Like all wild birds the linnet is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

LINNET ACTIONS			
ACTION	DATE	POSSIBLE PARTNERS	MEETS TARGET NO.
<u>POLICY AND LEGISLATION</u>			
1. Seek opportunities to extend the Arable Stewardship Scheme to the Plan area.	2002	MAFF, EN, RSPB, FWAG	1, 2
2. Seek opportunities to extend the Organic Aid Scheme.	2004	MAFF, EN, RSPB, FWAG	1, 2
<u>SITE MANAGEMENT</u>			
4. Identify demonstration sites as examples of best practice– use Countryside Stewardship.	2004	MAFF, DBAP, FWAG, RSPB	1, 2
5. Promote retention of mature trees in hedgerows and open country.	2004	MAFF, FWAG, DBAP, CDHP	1, 2
6. Seek opportunities to increase uptake of Countryside Stewardship and Organic Aid Schemes.	ONGOING	MAFF, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2
7. Promote provision of set aside and areas of uncut grassland.	2004	MAFF, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2
<u>RESEARCH AND MONITORING</u>			
8. Develop monitoring schemes as part of the Lowland Farmland Bird Monitoring Scheme.	2004	DBC, RSPB, DBAP, BTO	1
<u>ADVISORY</u>			
9. Work through the Agriculture and Biodiversity Advisory Group to provide information on positive management for farmland birds.	ONGOING	FWAG, ABAG, DBAP, BTO	1, 2
10. Provide training and advice for agri-environment project officers.	2004	RSPB, FWAG, DBAP	1, 2
<u>COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY</u>			
11. Raise awareness of the decline in farmland birds and possible solutions.	ONGOING	DBAP, RSPB, DBC, CA	1, 2